

“One Nation One Subscription” Scheme: A Critical Analysis of Its Impact on Academic Library Collections in India

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Abstract:

The rapid growth of scholarly publications and rising subscription costs have posed significant challenges for academic libraries worldwide. In India, the Government introduced the “One Nation One Subscription” (ONOS) scheme to provide nationwide access to international scholarly journals through a centralized subscription model. The initiative aims to enhance equitable access to academic resources for students, researchers, and faculty members across higher educational institutions. Through a unified digital platform managed by the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre, the scheme provides access to thousands of journals from major global publishers. While ONOS promises to democratize knowledge and reduce institutional subscription costs, it also raises several concerns related to collection development autonomy, sustainability, and long-term financial implications for libraries. This study critically examines the concept, features, advantages, and limitations of the ONOS scheme and evaluates its potential impact on academic library collections in India. The paper further highlights key challenges faced by institutions in implementing the scheme and explores its implications for the future of scholarly communication and academic library management in the country.

Keywords: *One Nation One Subscription, academic libraries, scholarly communication, e-journal access, library consortia, digital libraries, research access, India.*

1. Introduction

Access to scholarly literature is a fundamental requirement for research and academic development. However, increasing subscription costs of international journals have created financial pressure on academic libraries. To address this issue, the Government of India introduced the **One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)** scheme aimed at providing nationwide access to scholarly journals through a centralized subscription system. The initiative seeks to ensure equitable access to research resources for higher educational institutions across the country. By integrating multiple library consortia under a single national framework, ONOS

attempts to streamline access and reduce duplication of subscriptions. The scheme represents a major transformation in the management of digital resources in Indian academic libraries.

2. Review of Related Literature

The rising cost of scholarly journals has long been a major concern for academic libraries worldwide. According to Suber (2012), the traditional subscription-based scholarly publishing model has created barriers to knowledge access, particularly for institutions with limited financial resources. In the Indian context, consortia such as UGC-INFONET, e-ShodhSindhu, and INDEST were developed to address this challenge by negotiating collective subscriptions to electronic journals (Arora, 2018). These initiatives significantly improved access to digital scholarly resources for universities and research institutions. However, disparities still remained among institutions due to differences in funding and infrastructure (Das & Singh, 2020). The introduction of the ONOS scheme represents an extension of the consortium approach at the national level. According to government reports, the scheme provides centralized access to more than 13,000 scholarly journals from about 30 international publishers to over 6,000 higher educational institutions in India. Studies on national subscription models indicate that such initiatives can reduce duplication of costs and enhance research productivity by expanding access to scholarly literature (Sharma & Gupta, 2023). However, critics argue that centralized subscription models may limit institutional autonomy in collection development and may not fully address disciplinary diversity (Kumar, 2024). Therefore, there is a need to critically examine the implications of ONOS for academic library collections in India.

3. Statement of the Problem

Academic libraries in India have traditionally relied on institutional subscriptions and consortia-based access to scholarly journals. However, rising subscription costs and unequal access among institutions have created significant barriers to research. The introduction of the ONOS scheme aims to overcome these challenges by providing centralized access to international journals. Despite its potential benefits, concerns remain regarding its impact on collection development policies, financial sustainability, and institutional autonomy. Therefore, a critical analysis of the ONOS scheme is necessary to understand its implications for academic library collections and scholarly communication in India.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the concept and scope of the ONOS scheme in India.
- To analyze the major features of the ONOS initiative.
- To evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the scheme for academic libraries.
- To identify the challenges and limitations associated with the implementation of ONOS.
- To assess its potential impact on academic library collections in India.

5.1 One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)

The **One Nation One Subscription (ONOS)** scheme is a national initiative launched by the Government of India to provide unified access to scholarly journals and research publications for all government-funded higher educational institutions and research organizations. The

scheme operates through a centralized subscription model managed by the Information and Library Network (INFLIBNET) Centre under the University Grants Commission.

The primary objective of the ONOS initiative is to ensure equitable access to high-quality academic resources for researchers, faculty members, and students across the country. Under this scheme, the government negotiates subscription agreements with major international publishers and provides access through a national digital platform. The scheme covers more than 13,000 scholarly journals published by about 30 international publishers and benefits approximately 1.8 crore students, researchers, and faculty members in India .

5.2 Types / Access Models under ONOS

- **Centralized National Subscription Model**
The government negotiates and pays subscription fees to publishers on behalf of all participating institutions.
- **Digital Platform-Based Access Model**
Access to journals is provided through a centralized digital portal managed by INFLIBNET.
- **Institutional Access Model**
Universities and research institutions access resources through IP-based authentication or institutional login.

List of ONOS Publishers (30) in India
1. Elsevier (ScienceDirect)
2. Springer Nature
3. Taylor & Francis
4. Wiley
5. IEEE
6. American Chemical Society
7. American Institute of Physics
8. American Physical Society
9. American Mathematical Society
10. American Society for Microbiology
11. American Society of Civil Engineers
12. ASME
13. Annual Reviews
14. Bentham Science
15. BMJ Journals
16. Cambridge University Press
17. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press
18. ICE Publishing
19. Institute of Physics Publishing
20. IndianJournals.com
21. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins

22. Oxford University Press
23. Project MUSE
24. SAGE Publishing
25. SPIE Digital Library
26. Thieme Medical Publishers
27. American Association for the Advancement of Science
28. American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics
29. Emerald Publishing
30. ACM Digital Library

These publishers collectively provide thousands of journals covering diverse academic disciplines such as science, technology, medicine, social sciences, and humanities.

5.3 Features of the ONOS Scheme

The ONOS scheme incorporates several features designed to enhance access to scholarly resources and strengthen the research ecosystem in India.

- **Centralized National Subscription**

The scheme operates on a centralized subscription model where the government negotiates agreements with multiple international publishers and provides access to journals for institutions nationwide.

- **Nationwide Access to Scholarly Journals**

The initiative provides access to more than 13,000 peer-reviewed journals covering multiple academic disciplines, enabling researchers to access high-quality scholarly content.

- **Integration of Library Consortia**

Before the introduction of ONOS, several library consortia such as UGC-INFONET, INDEST, and e-ShodhSindhu operated independently. The scheme integrates these initiatives under a unified national framework.

- **Digital Access Platform**

The scheme provides a centralized digital portal that allows users to search, access, and download scholarly articles. The platform includes discovery tools that enable efficient retrieval of research publications.

- **Institutional Coverage**

The ONOS initiative covers more than 6,000 higher educational institutions and research organizations across India, including universities, colleges, and national research laboratories.

- **Article Processing Charge (APC) Support**

The scheme also includes provisions for supporting article processing charges (APCs) for open access publications in selected journals, encouraging Indian researchers to publish internationally.

- **Equity in Knowledge Access**

One of the key functions of ONOS is to bridge the knowledge gap between well-funded institutions and smaller universities by providing equal access to scholarly resources.

- **Support for Research and Innovation**

By enabling broader access to scholarly literature, the scheme aims to enhance research productivity and promote innovation within the Indian academic ecosystem

6. Advantages

- **Equitable Access to Resources**

The ONOS scheme ensures equal access to scholarly journals for students, researchers, and faculty across various higher educational institutions in India, reducing disparities between well-funded and smaller institutions.

- **Reduction in Subscription Costs**

Centralized negotiation with publishers helps reduce the financial burden on individual institutions by lowering the cost of journal subscriptions.

- **Improved Research Productivity**

Access to a large number of international journals enables researchers to stay updated with recent developments, which can enhance the quality and quantity of academic research.

- **Simplified Resource Management**

The centralized system reduces administrative work for libraries as subscription management and licensing are handled at the national level.

- **Promotion of Academic Collaboration**

With access to the same scholarly resources, researchers from different institutions can collaborate more effectively in research and publication activities.

7. Disadvantages

- **Limited Institutional Autonomy**

Libraries may have limited freedom in selecting journals according to their specific academic and research needs.

- **Dependence on Government Funding**

The scheme relies heavily on continuous government financial support, which may affect sustainability in the long term.

- **Incomplete Coverage of Specialized Journals**

Some niche or subject-specific journals required by certain disciplines may not be included in the national subscription package.

- **Risk of Underutilization**

Without proper training and awareness programs, many users may not fully utilize the available scholarly resources.

- **Technical and Infrastructure Issues**
Institutions with limited digital infrastructure or poor internet connectivity may face difficulties in accessing online resources.

8. Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential benefits, the ONOS scheme faces several challenges that may affect its long-term effectiveness.

- **Financial Sustainability**
The scheme involves a significant financial commitment from the government, with an estimated budget of approximately ₹6,000 crore for the initial three-year period (2025–2027). Ensuring long-term funding for the program remains a major challenge.
- **Coverage of Journals**
Although the scheme provides access to thousands of journals, some important databases and specialized publications may not be included in the subscription package.
- **Institutional Autonomy**
Centralized decision-making may limit the ability of individual libraries to curate collections according to their specific academic and research needs.
- **Technical Infrastructure**
Effective implementation requires robust digital infrastructure and reliable internet connectivity, particularly for institutions located in rural or remote areas.
- **Awareness and Training**
Many users may lack adequate awareness or training to effectively utilize the available resources, which may limit the overall impact of the scheme.
- **Copyright and Licensing**
Issues Negotiating licensing agreements with multiple publishers can create legal and administrative challenges for the implementing agencies.
- **Dependence on Global Publishers**
The scheme relies heavily on international commercial publishers, which may raise concerns about long-term access costs and pricing policies.

9. Conclusion

The One Nation One Subscription scheme represents a significant step toward improving access to scholarly information in India. By providing centralized access to thousands of international journals, the initiative has the potential to democratize knowledge and strengthen the research ecosystem across higher educational institutions. The scheme can particularly benefit universities with limited financial resources by ensuring equitable access to high-quality academic resources. However, the success of ONOS depends on effective implementation, sustainable funding, and continuous evaluation of its impact on academic libraries. Addressing challenges related to coverage, infrastructure, and institutional autonomy will be essential for

ensuring that the scheme achieves its intended objectives. In the long term, ONOS may play a crucial role in transforming scholarly communication and enhancing research productivity in India.

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